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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 004132

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PHUM ELAB PREF KWMN IZ JO KTIP

SUBJECT: GOJ CONFRONTS POSSIBLE LABOR TRAFFICKING SCAM INVOLVING IRAQ

Classified By: Ambassador Edward Gnehm for reasons 1.5 b and d

1. (C) SUMMARY: Post has learned of several dozen third country nationals (TCNs) brought to Jordan by apparently unscrupulous recruiting agents and sent to Iraq. All have needed some assistance in returning to their home countries and in at least one case, the workers were physically abused in Iraq before being repatriated. USG efforts to urge official Jordanian response have born some fruit as border procedures at the land crossing have changed for now, but this issue will need to be raised at the highest levels to ensure prompt investigation and preventive action. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) Beginning in late March, a U.S. military staff member of the Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Center (HACC) based at the Karama border with Iraq noticed an increase in the number of non-Arabs stranded and unable to enter (or re-enter) Jordan. Citizens of India and Bangladesh, they did not have the means to complete their onward travel and were stuck in the no-man's land between border posts. All were seeking or had sought employment in Iraq, though at least a majority had been promised work in Jordan prior to coming to the region. The HACC staffer helped to facilitate the entry of 12 Indians into Jordan for return to India, and Jordanian authorities refused exit into Iraq for at least one group of Indians during this time. The HACC staffer was also able to engage the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to assist a number of Bangladeshis in returning to their home country. As of May 19, IOM has had contact with 50 Bangladeshis at the border, most of whom wished to return home and whom IOM was able to assist. (Note: IOM is using funds from the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration-supported TCN assistance program.)

3. (SBU) In early May, three Sri Lankan women attempting to enter Jordan from Iraq came to the attention of the HACC. Unable to provide proper documentation or entry visa fees, they had been refused entry into Jordan. Upon further investigation, however, it was discovered that they had entered Jordan in January with contracts for domestic work in Jordan and were later moved to Iraq, though it is unclear by whom. While in Iraq, they faced physical abuse, with strong indications of sexual abuse as well. Under Jordanian law, the recruiting agency who brought the women to Jordan is obligated to return them to their home country, and the agency was contacted. However, when the brother of the main agent showed up at the border to retrieve the women, they responded hysterically and refused to depart with him. Jordanian authorities then held the man until his office faxed proof that they had purchased tickets for the women's return to Sri Lanka. (Note: The HACC has received several reports that this agency is involved in most of these illicit TCN movements.) The HACC staffer transported the women to the Sri Lankan embassy in Amman, where they remained until departing Jordan on May 14.

4. (C) This incident appears to have been a turning point in Jordanian border authorities' attitudes toward potential trafficking. For the past two weeks, Jordanian authorities have been proactively seeking proof of actual employment in Iraq and evidence of TCNs' ability to return to their home countries before allowing them to exit Jordan for Iraq. However, this goes beyond their legal mandate and it is not clear whether this practice will continue indefinitely. We have learned that the police supervisor at the border wrote a letter to the Interior Ministry asking that the recruiting agency in the Sri Lankan case be investigated. When IOM acted to assist the most recent group of Bangladeshis early last week, the Jordanian police asked IOM why the recruiting agents were not repatriating these workers, rather than IOM.

5. (C) Piecing together information from HACC and IOM (though their ability to communicate with many of the travelers has been limited by the lack of a common language), most, if not all, have been brought to Jordan by labor recruiters. It is unclear whether the recruiters are all based in Jordan, but none of these travelers were accompanied by agents when moving to and through the borders. The fees the travelers claim to have paid for their jobs and travel range from 500 to 2500 USD, a figure IOM identified as typical for global trafficking. Their nationalities have been limited to Indian, Bangladeshi, and, most recently Somali, in addition to the three Sri Lankan women. They have appeared at the border as groups. Some were told that they would be simply transiting

Jordan on the way to Iraq, while others claim they were promised positions in Jordan that did not materialize. From IOM's perspective, it is still unclear whether there is a trafficking element to these movements, but they are resistant to being perceived as facilitating trafficking and plan to work closely with the GOJ on addressing the situation. IOM, UNHCR, and the Embassy have all received inquiries from a CBS Radio reporter on this issue, though no press reports have yet appeared, to the best of our knowledge.

16. (C) Embassy raised this issue directly with the Legal Bureau in the MFA, our primary contact on trafficking in persons issues, as well as the Minister's Private Office on May 20. They took the matter seriously and promised to approach both the Interior and Labor Ministries about it. Poloff raised the matter with the Labor Ministry Secretary General on May 23, who assured Poloff that any agent found to have broken Jordanian law or skirted regulations would be shut down. He was confident that labor inspectors could uncover any wrongdoing and remarked that, unrelated to the incidents described above, he had earlier this month ordered the inspectors to review all of the approximately 70 agents licensed to recruit domestic workers in Jordan.

17. (C) COMMENT: It remains to be seen whether the events described here constitute the whole problem or simply the known aspects of it. While we judge the initial Jordanian official reaction to be responsive, it is a concern that what appears to be extensive labor trafficking was able to continue for several months. To ensure prompt and thorough GOJ investigation and preventive action, Ambassador intends to raise this situation at the highest levels. While we are going to be proactive on this issue on our side of the border, Department and CPA may wish to consider what can be done in conjunction with Iraqi authorities on the other side of the border to eliminate potential trafficking.

18. Baghdad minimize considered.

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GNEHM